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Ouvrage recensé :

The Zero-Sum Society. Distribution and the Possibilities for Economic Change, by Lester C. Thurow, New York, Basic Books Inc., 1980, 230 pp.

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fectifs, les politiques et le personnel de direction des syndicats britanniques.

Publiée en 1979, l'ouvrage a vite été épuisé et on a dû faire cette seconde édition révisée et mise à jour.

L'auteur, Senior Research Fellow in Industrial Relations at St Edmund Hall, Oxford, est un chercheur réputé qui a déjà publié avec son collègue E.O. Evans, **The Dictionary of Industrial Relations**. (Hutchison of London, 1973). Il s'est proposé de fournir à tous ceux qu'intéressent les relations industrielles en Grande-Bretagne un manuel qui leur fournirait toutes les informations utiles touchant les syndicats dans ce pays.

L'ouvrage est divisé en cinq parties: le mouvement syndical en Grande-Bretagne; les organisations syndicales; le répertoire des syndicats; une bibliographie des histoires officielles des syndicats; les adresses d'autres institutions en relations industrielles.

Pour un lecteur étranger à la Grande-Bretagne, il n'est pas grand intérêt de connaître les noms et les adresses de chacun des syndicats avec ceux de leurs dirigeants. Cependant, **Trade Union Handbook** apporte bien davantage.

La première partie particulièrement, non seulement présente un excellent résumé de l'histoire des syndicats avec leur évolution jusqu'aux développements les plus récents, mais expose aussi les transformations du droit syndical avec les diverses tentatives d'encadrement juridique qui ont suivi le **Rapport Donovan** et qui ont pour la plupart échoué.

Dans les parties subséquentes, il faut souligner que pour chacune des organisations ou des syndicats, l'auteur a pris la peine de préparer une brève note historique du groupement avec sa structure, son mode d'organisation et de fonctionnement ainsi que ses politiques. Il fournit aussi le nombre des effectifs en précisant même, lorsque cela est possible, celui des syndiquées de sexe féminin.

La préparation d'un ouvrage semblable a dû demander un travail considérable à son auteur, car il requiert une mise à jour continue. Mais en dehors de ces informations mouvantes, il reste un fond constant qui a une valeur permanente. Il serait à souhaiter qu'à partir du modèle fourni par **Trade Union Handbook** une publication semblable soit produite au Canada.

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The Zero-Sum Society. Distribution and the Possibilities for Economic Change, by Lester C. Thurow, New York, Basic Books Inc., 1980, 230 pp.

The U.S. society faces major challenges from outside as well as from inside and the current answer to them remains — according to L.C. Thurow — unsatisfactory. Since the Second World War industrial productivity rose 1 percent per year in the U.S., in comparison with around 5 percent in Japan and in GFR.

The decline of productivity in the U.S. is related to the growing share of services (with their productivity being 40 percent below the national average), idle capacity and the specific problems of mining, construction and utilities. It is not possible to solve satisfactorily the present day energy and growth problems without a considerable involvement of the U.S. government and its reasonable policy. With the growth of the public sector (federal, state and local governments employ directly or indirectly around 27 percent of the working people) and the more and more sophisticated articulation of various vested interests there is a question how to improve the general structure of society without upsetting it. "The problem is to establish a modicum of speedy, disinterested decision-making capacity in a political process where everyone has a direct self-interest (...) The proportion of any population that report themselves satisfied with their economic performance rises not at all as that population's average income rises" (pp. 16 and 18).

In the zero-sum game in order for somebody to gain, somebody else has to lose and, of course, in the democratic developed society less and less people accept to be losers. For example, the increase of the price of energy is much more painful for the poor than for the rich, and the latter are opposed to the free market option in the energy policy. "To stop inflation in the presence of upward price shocks, such as energy, governments must adopt policies that lower someone's income. The problem is not finding economic policies that will lower incomes, but being able to impose them" (p. 42). "Each potential solution to the inflation problem lowers someone's income by a large amount; each increases someone's economic insecurity" (p. 75).

Preoccupation of people and institutions with security in the economic life leads to the spread of rules and regulations which persist because someone's income is higher than it would be if the regulations did not exist. All economies are sets of rules and regulations — there is no such thing as the unregulated economy. "Without government regulations there are no property rights, and without property rights there is no free market (...). The real question and the real debate revolves not around the virtues of the regulated versus the unregulated economy, but around the question what constitutes a good set of regulations" (pp. 129 and 131).

Of course, there are many silly government regulations; for example, universal regulations in an area where they are impossible. Also do exist many areas that should have fewer regulations, for example transportation.

Regulations may arise from ideology, as this happens often in Europe, or from real problems, as this happens in the U.S. There is no consistent left-wing or right-wing position on regulation versus deregulation. There is no simple correlation between the degree of economic success and the degree of economic regulation. Each new regulation leads to the spread of other regulations. Long-run price controls are ineffective and should be avoided.

How far the government intervention is able to secure a better society? In the U.S. now 11 percent of the GNP consists of direct transfer payments (redistribution) in comparison with 4 percent in 1956. Government is a major provider of middle-class jobs and services focused on the middle-class needs and priorities. "With inflation there is a demand to cut back on government expenditures. But any cutback will increase the economic pressure on the poor (fewer income transfer payments) and the middle-class (fewer good jobs). With slow growth there are demands to further cut taxes on the rich to encourage savings and investment. But any cutback will necessitate increased taxes for the middle-class" (p. 158). Various groups demand a larger fraction of the whole pie and the government has to respond to all their conflicting demands.

It is not easy to cut on transfer payments to the needy. Half of the income of the elderly comes from these payments. The inequality of earnings between the bottom quintile and the top quintile or earners has grown very considerably since the late 1940's but the income position of the poor has improved. Highly educated women are heavily dependent in their jobs on government expenditure. Minority people are better paid in the public sector than in the private sector. "Government raises the earnings of women and minorities above what they would be if only the private economy were to exist" (p. 165).

The existing tax system appears as ineffective in procuring the income equalization. The upper quintile of all households formally has only 44 percent of total income but at the same time they have almost 80 percent of total wealth. The top half of one percent of the population own 43 percent of all corporate stock. "Many high-income individuals pay little or no tax: many others pay high taxes. Some low-income individuals pay high taxes: most do not /.../. Individuals with exactly the same income end up paying very different taxes in the United States" (p. 171). There are too many tax loopholes but the middle-class supports the higher income classes in the resistance against the tax reform.

Blacks, Hispanics and women are mostly interested in the state intervention on their behalf but their bargaining power remains limited against the white male coalition of vested interests. "Any government program to aid economic minorities must hurt economic majorities. This is the most direct of all of our zero-sum conflicts" (p. 189).

Under the pressure of growing demands for more equality in the distribution of incomes in the society, it will be more and more difficult for the government to satisfy the major contending partners. The distribution of family income as well of the wage and salary earnings has remained around the same during the whole period since the Second World War. However, the mean earnings of the fully employed white males are about three times as high as those of the rest of labour force, and in addition they are much more equal. The relative earning status of women versus men has deteriorated. The employment opportunities have also deteriorated. "The lack of employment opportunities is not a temporary, short-run aspect of the U.S. economy. It is permanent and endemic" (p. 205).

There are no easy and painless solutions to the conflicts of economic interests promoted and defended by various groups of the American population. On the other hand, it is not possible to solve satisfactorily the existing problems without making such decisions which may be unpleasant for some privileged groups. In the society based on mass manipulation people gradually learn how to organize themselves into the pressure groups and promote their own cause. It is not possible any more to depend on the naivete and defencelessness of large groups of people traditionally handicapped and controlled effectively by the better-off.

The book by Thurow provides a very good background to the mutual relationships between various categories of Americans: those who are rich, who are poor and who are in-between. Pluralism of the U.S. society has changed in its character under the impact of the mass social and educational upgrading.

Many categories of the U.S. population that had remained shy until not long ago now become outspoken. The super-rich meet presently much more resistance in the promotion of their own goals and interests. The role of the state has grown and even under the Republican administration civil service remains a powerful factor. The disassemble of the government and a really free market is a far cry even under the Reagan presidency.

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Rapport de la Commission d'experts pour l'application des conventions et recommandations, Conférence internationale du travail, 67^e session, Genève, Rapport III (Partie 4A), B.I.T., 1981, 255 pp.

Âge minimum, Étude d'ensemble de la Commission d'experts pour l'application des conventions et recommandations, Conférence internationale du travail, 67^e session, Genève, Rapport III (Partie 4B), B.I.T., 1981, 238 pp.

La tâche de la Commission d'experts pour l'application des conventions et recommandations (ci-après, la Commission) consiste à indiquer dans quelle mesure la situation dans chaque État apparaît conforme aux conventions ratifiées et aux obligations assumées par lui en vertu de la Constitution de l'O.I.T. en matière de normes internationales du travail. Dans le cadre de son mandat, la Commission qui est composée de personnalités indépendantes est gouvernée par des principes d'indépendance, d'objectivité et d'impartialité.

Le Rapport annuel de la Commission comporte, comme à l'accoutumée, trois parties: le rapport général, les observations concernant certains pays et une étude d'ensemble.

Afin d'illustrer le travail de la Commission, il nous est apparu intéressant de relever une observation de portée générale à propos de la **Convention (n° 122) sur la politique de l'emploi**, 1964, ainsi que deux observations